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ABSTRACT

Community colleges in Kentucky, like much of higher education nationwide, are facing a number of dichotomous conditions that need to be reconciled before a "just" educational system can be achieved. Connected to the development of systems approaches to higher education, these dichotomies include the following: (1) community colleges are funded at levels far below funding of regional universities, even though university enrollments have remained relatively stable while community colleges continue to grow; (2) institutional autonomy, incentive, and initiative have decreased as state control over budgeting and personnel practices has sought to increase cost effectiveness and efficiency, and pool talent resources; (3) the remnants of a machine bureaucracy organizational structure remain in place in community colleges, even though they no longer fit the institutions' increasingly professional organizational model; (4) strategic planning has replaced day-to-day arbitrary decision making, but at the cost of spontaneity and flexibility; and (5) driven by funding formulas to concentrate on building enrollments, colleges are employing more part-time faculty (who have less time to give individual attention to students) and providing fewer services. In addition to resolving these problems, community colleges will need to address concerns related to high rates of minority attrition, curricular and funding differentials between urban and rural colleges, an anticipated influx of older students in need of career retraining, inadequate funding, the continuing debate over mission, and the need for an orientation toward scholarship among community college faculty. (ALB)

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DICHOTOMIES WHICH CONFRONT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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TOWARD A "JUST" CONFIGURATION: DICHOTOMIES WHICH CONFRONT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

In "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," Wallace Stevens imagined, in a series of antithetical vignettes, various ways in which an object can be interpreted, just as each discipline of learning in a college or university takes a different approach to the axiological, ontological, and epistemological meanings implicit in any symbolic expression--as for instance could be done with a word such as "just." For some, "just," as in a "just society" means achieving equity or fairness, while for others it means reaching a balance of realities, and for still others "just" finally means "truth." It is the juxtaposition of the various meanings conjured up by the various disciplines from which we usually extrapolate an agreed-upon interdisciplinary truth which then guides our actions; the prevailing scientism of our culture, for instance, is fruitlessly but constantly assaulted by other points of view in refutation of the verity of the scientific approach to knowing. The consensus of western culture is that reality is best perceived through the rational disciplines of inductive logic and mathematics.

If a prevailing interpretation of reality takes the ascendancy, as scientism has in western culture since the Renaissance, it is only after a series of contrapuntal notions clash--sometimes for the duration of centuries--and finally synthesize. Of course, some dichotomies are never resolved, as, for the poet, death is the unreconcilable antithesis for human life. Nevertheless, it could be argued that antithesis is always healthy, that only from it can new life be formed or progress emanate.

In trying to arrive at some consensus on what a "just" configuration would be for an organization or a system, it is helpful to look at the whole pattern from the perspective of microcosmic dichotomies inherent in it before gradually stepping further back to view the entire conformation as a holistic entity.

The system of public higher education which has developed in the post-World War II era has become a complex configuration, made up of its various segment components--the "flagship" universities, the regional universities, the community colleges, and the occasional public "liberal arts" college. With the development of systems approaches to higher education, with their inexorable tendency to centralization, has arisen a concomitant series of seemingly irreconcilable dichotomies which will continue to challenge higher education over the next few decades.

This statement does not imply that the history of higher education is not replete with dichotomies, many of which were either reconciled, or obscured by larger issues, or made irrelevant by changing conditions. In each watershed period in

the history of higher education in the country, a new series of dichotomies has developed. From the time of the founding of Harvard College, a struggle over the control of the early colleges developed. In the Dartmouth College case, the private sector was guaranteed continuing governance of its own institutions. During the period of the Great Awakening, evangelistic fervor brought about the inception of a multitude of religiously affiliated colleges. The Morrill Land Grant Act created great state universities, which are now our "flagship" universities in the public realm. After the Civil War, a plethora of private colleges sprang up, bringing with it the "town-gown" dichotomy. Each of these movements had as its impetus the desire for the creation of a "just" system for the American people, however elitist its motives may be seen in retrospect. The democratic impulse was most apparent in the creation of land grant universities, and then some hundred years later, in the creation of an even more democratically inspired movement--the vast expansion of the community colleges.

In the time of the youth of American culture, isolated in small towns and rural areas which were removed from oppidan culture, often by a rough geography such as that in Appalachia, where people were imbued with the strong individualism of the Protestant Ethic and a sense of <u>carpe diem,</u> there was generated a desire to establish institutions which would embody, preserve, and nurture in youth what were thought to be the best aspects of the prevailing American ethos, derived as it was largely from a European heritage, copied from the English model. From the time

of the inception of Harvard in 1636, Americans became preoccupied with setting aside reserves of quiet isolation, where, in the midst of a busy commerce and a fierce devotion to material progress, young minds could be prepared for the elite positions of leadership in the professions of church, law, medicine and teaching. Newly-born colleges dotted the American landscape with thousands of chapel-domed campuses.

As the country grew more industrialized and urbanized, these isolated colleges were replaced by urban and secular colleges and universities which no longer saw themselves as removed from society, but as an integral part of it. Ours is now predominantly a secular culture with a post-industrial service economy which has seen the centers of power shift from individuals like the "robber-baron" benefactors of our most influential private universities to large corporate profit-oriented enterprises, which regard the university as a utilitarian resource for their own training and research needs.

It was not until after World War II that the creation of a "just configuration" of public higher education became an important popular motivation, inspired as it was primarily by the desire for women and minorities to achieve their rightful place in society.

The Southern Appalachian states, which have traditionally lagged behind the rest of the country, are of particular interest right now, as new highways and improved communications have made them accessible for the first time. With the lowest percentage of high school graduates in the country, there is recognition that "catching up" is imperative if a "just society" is to be

attained. The Commonwealth of Kentucky epitomizes some of the dichotomies which confront higher education in an era in which there is rapid urbanization, an expansion in the service sector of business, an increasing number of women in the work force, an escalating number of non-whites in the population, and an aging population. Kentucky is a border state which has traditionally been primarily rural, intensely political, slow to industrialize, and characterized by economic and educational disadvantagement. But Kentucky is a state that is coming of age in many aspects. Seeing a vital connection between economic growth and an improved educational system, both the Governor and the Legislature want better schools and colleges. As the economy improves, progressive groups like "Forward in the Fifth" and "The Shakertown Roundtable" urge immediate educational reforms. The U.S. Congressman for the Fifth Congressional District, Harold Rogers, and others are working to improve conditions in the area U.S. News and World Report called "the most educationally disadvantaged in the country."

THE COMPETITION FOR PUBLIC FUNDS: A DESTRUCTIVE DICHOTOMY

The first important dichotomy in most states is essentially a political one; it involves the proportion of funds allocated to the various subunits of the state systems. Recently, the Governor of Maryland attempted to deal with this problem by following the New York State model of putting all regional universities under a central administration. In most states, the community colleges have a separate board to which a certain allotment of funds is made on the basis of a formula devised by

state planners. In Kentucky, where the community college system is part of the University, there is no separate board for community colleges. The Council on Higher Education makes allocations to the state's two doctoral granting universities and to the four regional universities as well as the community colleges. In 1988-89, the 14 community colleges, which serve 25 percent of all students, received only 8 percent of the total state appropriation for higher education. While the regional universities were funded at from 9 to 29 percent above the SREB average, community colleges were funded at 21 percent below the average for the 15 SREB states, and in fact were the most poorly funded of all of the states. The community college system, in spite of the fact that it is the fastest growing in the country, with nearly an 80 percent growth rate over the past decade, received only 67 percent of the Council on Higher Education's funding formula.

In other states, the discrepancy is less pronounced, but still, after 30 years of growth and expansion, the community colleges are funded at levels far below the regional universities, even though enrollments in the regional universities have remained relatively stable while the community colleges continue to grow, as is the case in Kentucky, where enrollment in regional universities has increased less than 5 percent over the past decade.

This dichotomy must be reconciled if states like Kentucky are to close the education gap which has traditionally existed between it and the industrial states of the north and the sunbelt

section of the south. It is the community colleges which are providing service to the non-traditional student and devising new ways to serve industry. The least elitist of all collegiate institutions, the "open door" colleges are driven to open the doors of opportunity to all segments of the population.

INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY AND SYSTEMS

As almost all of the states have centralized control of public higher educational institutions, some to a much greater degree than others, institutional autonomy is lessened as proportionate control of budgeting, personnel practices, etc. is taken over by central offices. The salutary effects of systemization include increased cost effectiveness, efficiency, a pooling of talent resources, and tighter measures of educational effectiveness. However, in order to be most effective, institutions need a measure of autonomy. Over-control can dampen individual incentive and discourage innovative projects. When "consistency becomes the hobgoblin of little minds," individuals tend to meet minimum requirements rather than perform at maximum level. Consistency rather than daring innovation becomes the standard.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE AS AN ORGANIZATION

In the early days of the community college movement, most instructors came directly from the high schools. Gradually more instructors were trained with a college teaching career in mind. This has brought about a change in the attitude of the instructors; whereas in the late '50's and 60's teachers were used to being treated in the authoritarian mode of the high school, most community college instructors today have the more independent "professionalized" attitude prevalent among university teachers.

The rise of unions also changed the authoritarian structure of the early community colleges. Unionization separated faculties from administrations, with each having certain rights and prerogatives, often spelled out in legalistic manuals. As more and more women and minorities entered the community college teaching ranks, their rights were guarded by affirmative action laws and regulations, further limiting the power of administrators to make arbitrary decisions about personnel.

The dichotomy that is faced now involves the remnants of the "machine bureaucracy" structure which no longer fits the organizational model of the community college. In his Structures in Fives, Mintzberg demonstrated how the machine bureaucracy has changed in organizations dominated by professionals. While there is still a need for top-level leadership, executive administrators are confined to making decisions about more specific functions while the professionals carry out duties in

their own specialized areas. The tendency to highly specific specialization has been brought about by all of these factors and by the pressure of accrediting agencies.

PLANNING VERSUS CARPE DIEM

Strategic planning has gradually replaced the day-to-day arbitrary decision making which characterized the early community college administration. Community colleges now employ long-range planners who prepare useful and often very accurate plans to guide future development. The dominance of planning, however, has made some consider whether the sense of carpe diem, of being able to seize the day and take advantage of situations as they arise, has been lost. In the most bureaucratic systems, this ability to act has virtually been lost in a sea of regulations.

THE PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE COLLEGE DICHOTOMY

Private two-year colleges are in the most precarious position in their history. There is little doubt that, in many areas, private colleges have been adversely affected by competition from lower-cost, higher quality public institutions. For a time during the period of rapid expansion of the community colleges, private two-year colleges felt that it was imperative for them, in order to compete for students, to emulate the "comprehensiveness" of the community college. In developing a potpourri of programs and services, these colleges broadened their original purpose of providing primarily liberal arts-oriented curricula. The compulsion to add "career" or "terminal" programs was strong. In retrospect, this was a serious mistake.

Diversity, free choice in religious orientation,a sense of community and a perspective different from the prevailing

scientism--"the myth of objective conscienciousness" as Theodore Roszak called it--have been some of the contributions of the small, usually church-related two-year colleges. Some charge that in emulating the community colleges, the private colleges lowered standards, cut corners, postponed maintenance of physical plants, and too heavily burdened their most talented persons, many of whom were lured away by better salaries in the public sector.

Because of the pressures of an increasingly competitive market for students, inadequate sources of money, the loss of community-centeredness, the erosion of traditional religious values, a "talent dearth," the turning of business and industry to the public sector for specialized training, the decline of the belief in the efficacy of the liberal arts residential tradition, and perhaps most damaging of all, the failure of private two-year colleges to unite together to form political power blocks, these institutions have gradually lost ground. The strongest of them are the ones which did not try to imitate the community colleges but rather kept their focus narrow, their values traditional, built a large endowment, and put a primacy on the residential aspect of the college environment.

In many cases, the private two-year colleges were their own worst enemies. In several instances, church conferences set up boards of trustees which governed three colleges, two of them four-year liberal arts colleges and one two-year college. They then funded the two-year college at a considerably lower level than the other two colleges, blocked the development efforts of

the two-year college because they did not want the smaller college taking prospective private donors from the four-year colleges, and in other ways made invidious distinctions which nearly destroyed the two-year college.

And yet, in the end, as many of the two-year colleges are lost, one who believes in the American system of free enterprise must be saddened. The private two-year college's inability to compete is, in some respects, like the "mom and pop" grocery stores which have been obliterated by the corporate chain stores. While some would say that such colleges have outlived their usefulness, they do represent a traditional American belief in freedom of choice, and it would be a shame if the public-private dichotomy resulted in the death of the two-year private sector altogether.

PRESSURES ON ADMINISTRATORS

One of the tensions between faculties and administrators is the emphasis administrations place on enrollment figures. Growth in the number of students enrolled often becomes an end in itself; administrators are driven by funding formulas to concentrate on building enrollments even when they know that their institutions are not equipped to handle more students.

"It's the system," one administrator said. "I know that we do not have enough full-time faculty to teach 100 more students, but if I don't increase the numbers, we won't get the funding we need to keep the place functioning well in other respects." The result is an increase in part-time faculty, less individualized attention for students, and fewer services available. This sums up the dichotomy which has developed because of funding formulas

which focus on numbers of students rather than upon quality of education.

WHITE AND NON-WHITE POPULATIONS

Projected demographics for the next several decades illuminate growing dichotomies in several areas. Louis Harris has pointed out that over one-third of the U.S. population will be non-white by the turn of the century, as will nearly half of all children under 18 years of age. Minorities must be well-trained in order to meet work force shortages in the next ten years.

Increasingly, metropolitan community colleges are enrolling the largest numbers of minority students. In the Kentucky system, the highest percentages of minority students are enrolled in the metropolitan area community colleges; sadly, it is among this portion of the population that there is the highest rate of attrition. Beyond the absolute necessity for the larger community colleges to train this growing segment of the population, there is a related dichotomy--rural community colleges are more homogeneous by racial and class backgrounds than are the urban community colleges. We cannot afford to have two types of community colleges--those geared for multiracial, heterogenous populations and those serving largely homogeneous white populations.

THE URBAN-RURAL DICHOTOMY

A related phenomenon is the growing curricular, funding, and quality differential between the large metropolitan community colleges and the smaller, rural ones. While from the point of

view of form they are similar, their substance is often different. The urban community colleges have become "downtown universities," or "beltway universities," as one person called them. The small-town colleges retain the community-oriented flavor of the old time college. The small colleges struggle to emulate their larger cousins in the cities--and this is probably a mistake, as there are many advantages to the smaller, more individualized programs and services which the small community colleges can and do provide. Systems usually favor the larger colleges, giving them the best programs and the most funding, not only because they serve more students: the urban community college usually have stronger political clout in the state legislatures. Bigger is not always better, but "the system" favors bigness.

AN AGING STUDENT POPULATION

With an aging population, the average age of community college students continues to increase. Harris predicts that when new legislation outlawing mandatory retirement takes full force by 1992, as many as one-third of the retired elderly will reenter the work force due to labor shortages. This will mean a tremendous influx of older students into the community colleges, giving an implication that a bifarcation by age groups could dichotomize the colleges, especially with regard to teaching styles, scheduling, and traditional student activities and counseling.

QUALITY VERSUS QUANTITY

All of the above dichotomies relate to the problem of how to

maintain quality when classes are too large, services are minimal, space is at a premium, and when faculty are not given appropriate incentives for professional development in time and money; all, of course, relate to the question of whether the community colleges are properly funded. The normal measures of quality: student-teacher ratios, average number of students per class, instructor qualifications, etc., are in some way tied to the adequate funding of the colleges. In too many cases, quality is sacrificed because the community colleges cannot keep up with the numbers of people who need their services. Some highly expensive programs, such as in the health-related professions, are badly needed but not provided because funding is not available. Non-revenue producing programs, such as those for senior citizens, are too often sacrificed.

THE DEBATE OVER MISSION

A continuing debate in the community colleges is over whether they are primarily university-transfer institutions or whether they should be primarily career-oriented. This is probably a healthy dichotomy, because it keeps the focus of faculty and administrators on the mission of the community college, which obviously is to do both of these things as well as to provide community services and continuing education. It is only when a community college swings to one extreme or the other, to the detriment of the other side, that the question of proportion must be raised.

The value of general education should be questioned by each generation, for the question of the importance of the liberal

arts in an individual's life is of concern to every faculty member. Each time a new, highly technical curriculum is proposed, the question of how many general education courses are necessary is posed. Each time, it is valuable for the faculty to debate this issue, for while there is no definitive answer to what constitutes a real education, each faculty should be courageous enough to assert what it believes is necessary to attain a "good" education.

RESEARCH VERSUS TEACHING

As much as the community colleges claim that they are "teaching" institutions, they still give the greatest credence in faculty evaluations to publication over teaching performance in the classroom. Scholarship is highly important, and faculty members should constantly renew themselves either through scholarship or through continuing education but evaluations should be fair, rewarding those who are outstanding teachers, who contribute to community services, advising, student activities, administrative efficiency, as well as to scholarship.

TEACHING VALUES VERSUS OBJECTIVITY

Probably one of the healthiest and oldest debates in the community colleges is whether values can and should be taught by community college teachers. Some assert that all knowledge is value-laden; others claim that science is value-less, that it is a process which does not attempt to influence the values of others. Even the humanities, they say, should only present values, but never advocate them.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

These are at least 13 of the dichotomies facing the community colleges. Some are far more serious than others; some of the differences engender healthy debates, and, in essence, make the community colleges true academic institutions. It is, after all, the clash of ideas which makes a true intellectual community.

The most serious dichotomy of all is between those who recognize the potential and acknowledge the contribution of the community college, and those who still regard it as a blackbird, which in comparison with the elite and more beautiful dove, is to be taken for granted but not encouraged. In the "just society" which America must become in the next few decades if it is to remain the world's economic and democratic leader, persons in power must view the configuration of the community colleges and its impact upon the future realistically, and fund it more appropriately.

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